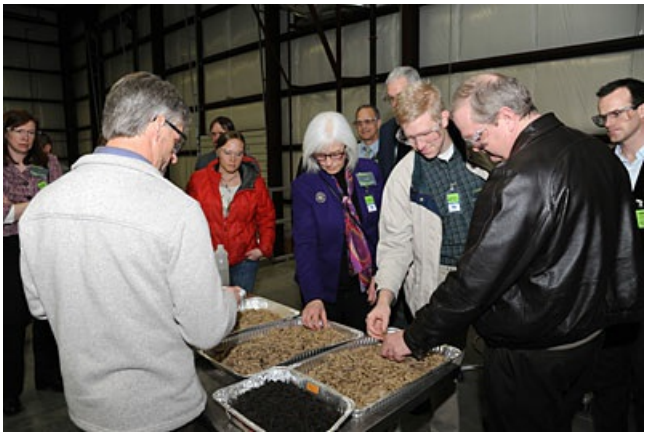


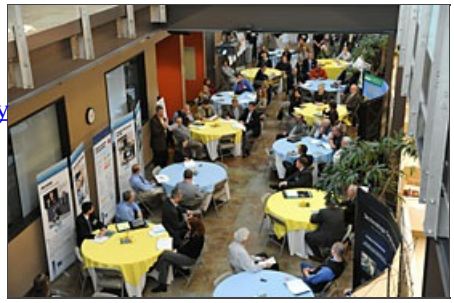
Idaho Research Symposium participants examine biomass pellets during a tour of INL's new Energy Systems Laboratory. The symposium is an annual workshop that connects local and regional companies with energy researchers.

Idaho Research Symposium draws entrepreneurs, executives, venture capitalists

By Kortny Rolston, *INL Communications & Governmental Affairs*

As the director of a Utah-based venture capital firm that invests in renewable energy, Todd Stevens receives dozens of invitations each year to attend energy-related conferences or events.

Some he attends. Most he skips.



The symposium focused on energy and related research occurring at INL and the CAES partner universities.

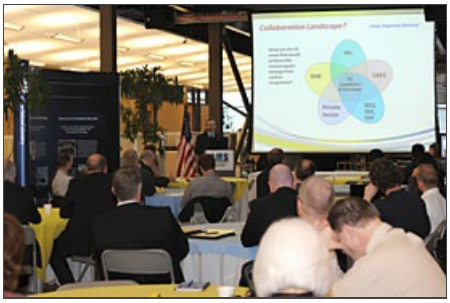
But there is one that Stevens, who leads RenewableTech Ventures, never misses — the Idaho Research Symposium, an energy-focused workshop sponsored by the Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES), Idaho National Laboratory (INL) and the Idaho Technology Council (ITC).

Stevens has attended since CAES launched the event in 2011 to connect local and regional companies with researchers who participate in the center. CAES is a partnership between Boise State University, INL, Idaho State University and University of Idaho.

"People don't realize the breadth and depth of the research being done here in Idaho," he said. "I think if they did, they would be amazed. They view INL as a nuclear-only facility when it actually does a lot of other work that can benefit the private sector."

Stevens also attends to keep tabs on CAES. The partnership, he says, intrigues him.

"It's very rare to find universities that work together collaboratively with one another, much less a national lab," he said. "What Idaho has with CAES is very unique."



The annual symposium connects local and regional companies with energy researchers.

Stevens was one of 60-plus people who attended the 2013 Idaho Research Symposium held Feb. 5 to 6 at the CAES building in Idaho Falls.

Like in previous years, the 2013 conference focused on energy and related research occurring at INL and the CAES partner universities. But this year's conference focused on some new areas such as hybrid energy systems, cybersecurity, transportation and energy storage.

It also featured tours of CAES and the Energy Systems Laboratory, a new state-of-the-art facility that supports INL's hybrid energy, biomass and advanced vehicle testing research.

"We really wanted to introduce areas of research we haven't in the past and also showcase new capabilities available at INL and CAES," said Jay Larsen, ITC's executive director and a conference organizer. "We think we succeeded in demonstrating to attendees, especially those from outside the state, that Idaho has a lot to offer in this area."

The conference drew a mix of energy executives, private-sector participants, venture capitalists like Stevens and entrepreneurs like Jon Boren of Sage Energy.

Boren started the company to develop a flow-based hydropower technology that can generate electricity from irrigation canals and other moving bodies of water. As the head of a small startup company, he attended the conference to network and learn how to overcome different obstacles that Sage Energy faces.

Boren left the two-day conference with a list of potential collaborators and a new understanding of

the research and resources available in Idaho.

"I had no idea there was so much here," he said.

Kyoko Roberts, a business development manager for Hitachi High Technologies America, Inc., also was a first-time attendee. As a "tech scout," she is always hunting for a new idea that could turn into a business line for her company.

She already has followed up with some researchers who presented at the conference.

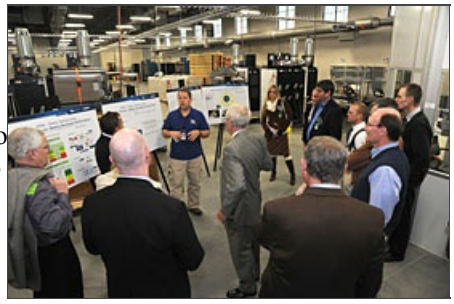
"There were some technologies I definitely felt like had a future," she said.

Stevens also left with several ideas for collaboration with CAES, the Idaho universities and INL.

"I definitely heard some areas we can work together," he said.

(Posted March 18, 2013)

Feature Archive



Symposium participants visit the battery testing facility at INL's new Energy Systems Laboratory.